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ABSTRACT

Assessment of the Spanish-speaking bilingual child's language dominance is essential to bilingual education, but to date there is no universally accepted way of doing this. There are many tests on the market which purport to measure language dominance and achievement, and which involve various criteria and methods. This paper describes four tests, each of which can be useful in contributing to an overall assessment of language dominance. The Bilingual Syntax Measure defines language in terms of phonemes, and is designed to measure oral proficiency in English and Spanish. The Dos Amigos Verbal Language Scale measures language development in English and Spanish separately. The James Language Dominance Test is designed to assess active and passive language dominance of kindergarten and first grade Mexican American children. The Pictorial Test of Bilingualism and Language Dominance measures oral vocabulary for both Spanish and English, as well as phonological, morphological, and syntactic development in both languages. (AM)

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DEMONSTRATION OF ASSESSMENT OF LANGUAGE DOMINANCE OF SPANISH-SPEAKING BILINGUAL CHILDREN

PRESENTED BY: Susan Helmer

The determination of language dominance in Spanish-speaking children is imperative. According to the Rules and Regulations to Govern the Administration and Operation of Special Education (1976), "...Before a child is given a case study evaluation, the local school district shall be responsible for determining the child's language use pattern, mode of communication and cultural background." This must be noted in the child's permanent record. Assessment of the child's language dominance is essential, but to date there is no universally accepted way of accomplishing this.

As a result of litigation involving bilingual children's right to receive an equal education (Diana vs. California Board of Education; Lau vs. Nichols) school districts are slowly beginning to assess bilingual children in their native language. This process involves intraindividual assessment by bilingual psychologists and psychometrists. Because school districts have not responded due to many reasons including the inability to find bilingual psychologists, the Office of Civil Rights in Washington D.C. has begun citing school districts for non-compliance with the Lau Decision.

Large School districts such as New York City are finding it increasingly more difficult to meet the demands set by the Office of Civil Rights in the amount of time allotted. Of the 1.1 million school children, 370,000 bilingual children must be dominance tested. The Office of Education has set up a department which offers assistance to school districts to help in planning, implementation and evaluation of what have come to be called the Lau Remedies for compliance achievement.

The Lau Remedies consist of minimal requirements which must be met in order that federal funding may be continued. The main areas that must be addressed are: student identification, language assessment procedures, diagnostic-prescriptive and program selection procedures. Determining the child's language dominance through testing is the first measure that should be undertaken prior to any further testing. Information on language dominance is needed to avoid misplacement as a result of misdiagnosis of children from backgrounds where English is not the primary language.

To date, language dominance testing is one of the few types of testing of minority children or non-English speaking children specifically that doesn't cause controversy (Adler, 1973; Goldman and Hartig, 1976). Testing and assessment are needed if the results are utilized in a way that will aid in the search for the bilingual child's strengths. Once uncovered, educators can build upon them to provide a program based on the child's best mode or modes of learning.

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There are many language dominance tests on the market which purport to measure language dominance and language achievement. The criteria utilized by test writers varies greatly and may include any or all of the following: syntax, vocabulary, phonology and pragmatics. The methods used to elicit student response may include any combination of aural/oral/written. For the purpose of this presentation, four language dominance tests were chosen. The instruments being considered here are: Bilingual Syntax Measure, Dos Amigos Verbal Language Scales, James Dominance Test and Pictorial Test of Bilingualism and Dominance.

The Bilingual Syntax Measure defines language in terms of discrete units (phonemes) and is designed to measure the child's oral proficiency in English and Spanish. Test administration is individual and takes 8-10 minutes per child. The children are encouraged to express their thoughts and opinions about colorful stimulus pictures. The children aged 4-9 are rated on a scale from 1-5 in English and 1-5 in Spanish. Level 1 signifies that the child speaks no English (or Spanish). Level 2 children are able to produce some English (or Spanish) in verbal routines, they are also able to repeat short sentences or questions. Level 3 children can usually make themselves understood by using a combination of simple speech, gestures, and an occasional word from their native language. When speaking English, these children sometimes omit nouns and verbs, replacing the omitted words with gestures or other words. They can communicate in English, but do so with difficulty. Level 4 children have very little difficulty communicating their ideas in English (or Spanish). They control a number of basic grammatical structures. Level 5 children demonstrate native or near-native proficiency in English. They control most of the basic grammatical structure of English and their speech is comparable to native English speakers of their own age.

The Dos Amigos Verbal Language Scales is an individual test that can be administered and scored in about ten minutes for each scale. It consists of two scales in English and two scales in Spanish and yields a separate measure of the child's language development in each language.

The test has a list of 85 stimulus words and their opposites and a similar list of 85 Spanish words and their opposites. The scales are arranged in ascending order of difficulty. The examiner must determine that the child is able to understand what an opposite is and that he can demonstrate this knowledge before beginning the test. The examiner reads the stimulus to the child and records a plus for a correct response; a zero for an incorrect response. The examiner continues until the child completes the scale or misses five consecutive words. The number of correct responses should be recorded as the raw score on the front of the test. The examiner then goes to the appropriate age table and locates the raw score and the percentile for that score in order to enter it on the front of the form. The higher percentile for the age indicates the dominant language.

of the child. Any child who scores below the fiftieth percentile in both English and Spanish should be evaluated further to determine the problem.

The James Language Dominance Test is a short test designed to assess the language dominance of kindergarten and first grade Mexican-American children. It consists of 40 visual stimuli designed to yield a measure of the child's language dominance or bilingualism in both production and comprehension. It can be administered individually by professional or para-professional staff in 7-10 minutes. Test results are used to classify children as Spanish-dominant, bilingual with Spanish as the home language, bilingual with both English and Spanish at home, English dominant but bilingual in comprehension, and English dominant in both comprehension and production. The test should be given in Spanish first and then followed in English. The test should be administered in one session.

The Pictorial Test of Bilingualism and Language Dominance utilizes a series of pictures in which each picture depicts a single concept. The test is broken into two parts. Part I of the instrument consists of 40 pictures designed to elicit a particular vocabulary word. The words are presented in the order indicated on the answer sheet. The child is permitted to respond in either English or Spanish and is then asked to supply the word in the unused language. Thus the following measures will be obtained: 1.) total oral vocabulary for both English and Spanish. 2.) the preference or tendency to rely on one language or the other. 3.) English and Spanish oral vocabulary scores and the extent of bilingual oral vocabulary development.

Part II of this test measures the child's own output of verbal material by using the two pictures as stimuli. In this situation, the child is asked to tell a story based on a picture and to respond to questions. This method will give a more detailed language sample illustrating different components of a language acquisition such as phonetic, morphemic and syntactic abilities. The responses obtained on the Pictorial Test of Bilingualism and Language Dominance will yield the following results placing the child in one of four categories of bilingualism/monolingualism.

- LEVEL I - Responses are single vocabulary words and linking words that identify objects or describe actions. Responses do not communicate complete thoughts. Sentences aren't formed.
- LEVEL 2 - Responses communicate complete thoughts but tenses are grammatically incorrect and/or incomplete.
- LEVEL 3 - Responses are grammatically correct sentences that communicate complete thoughts with subject/verb/object relationships expressed.
- LEVEL 0 - The child cannot respond in the language. He has no expressive vocabulary in the language and/or cannot understand directions given in the language.

These tests take different approaches, but all aim toward a similar goal: assessment of the bilingual child's language by measuring his vocabulary, sentence structure and/or word usage. Because the child's total language is an infinite body, no one test can accurately predict how "bilingual" a child is. The results of each of the language tests can be useful in contributing to an overall assessment of language dominance in the bilingual child.